

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

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MORE THAN 300 MENTALLY retarded persons and their families received assistance during the first 10 months of operation of the state's two regional centers. Ninety-three per cent of the families who requested center care have continued with the program.

The regional center program was established during the 1965 session of the State legislature. The State Department of Public Health in December of that year awarded the first two contracts for center operation to Aid Retarded Children, Inc., San Francisco, and to Los Angeles Childrens Hospital.

The centers began operation in February 1966. Problems of recruitment of skilled personnel limited operations at first, but by the end of June both centers were fully staffed and caseloads then increased considerably.

Services of the two centers include diagnosis, counseling on a continuing basis to the mentally retarded person and his family, special medical services, nursery and preschool training, recreation, vocational rehabilitation and residential facilities.

During the first year of operation priority for assistance was given to persons who had been accepted for care in a state hospital but for whom beds were not currently available.

In the first two months of operation 40 per cent of the families requesting assistance had already placed their retarded children outside their home. By late autumn only 20 per cent of the families requesting assistance had resorted to this alternative.

Over half of the assistance provided by the cen-

ters has been counseling activities. Because of this, and the decrease in the proportion of crisis cases, the State Health Department has arranged for increased counseling staff at both centers.

Eighty per cent of the mentally retarded persons receiving assistance were born in California, 19 per cent in other states and 1 per cent outside the United States. The age range is from less than one year to 52 years. Twenty-one per cent are under five years of age, 72 per cent between the ages of five and 21, and 7 per cent are 21 years of age or older.

Envisaged is a statewide network of regional centers to help in their own communities the thousands of mentally retarded persons who do not need to be relegated to lifetime confinement in a state institution. At the same time the program will make institutional care available to those who really need it.

The 1966 Population Study Commission has completed its assignment and its findings and recommendations have been published in a report prepared by the State Department of Public Health.

Twenty-six recommendations were made, dealing with such issues as broader dissemination of family planning information and services, therapeutic abortion legislation, family life education and extending Medi-Cal benefits to all low income families.

Single copies of the report may be obtained upon request to Theodore A. Montgomery, M.D., Chief, Division of Preventive Medical Services, State Department of Public Health, 2151 Berkeley Way, Berkeley.